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Practical Application of Total Quality Management System to Education of International Students

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Abstract

This paper deals with the acute question of education of international students. The main principles of the Total Quality Management System (TQM) were implemented in the planning and organization of educational and other processes which are important to education. The development of new forms and methods of educational activity, the establishment of new links between different issues, and understanding effective management of all processes are vital to achieving successful results. The elements of the TQM connected with the cycle “Plan-Do-Check-Action” (PDCA) define the policy of organization in the educational process for international students. Innovative services, techniques and forms of education, information technologies, and professional development improve the outcomes of teaching goals and the educational system as a whole.

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1. Introduction

Education of international students is accompanied by specific activities at any institution of higher education. This is determined by the scope of educational, methodological and resource features, as well as the necessity of socio-cultural and everyday support and enrollment activity.

International students who come for higher education to foreign universities rather differ from Russian students by their status, and educational and living standards because of other personal and educational needs. International

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students who apply to foreign universities have diverse educational background and expectations coming from the educational and supporting systems of their countries. Diverse educational models are accompanied by ethnic, national, and cross-cultural differences.

Moreover, the international market of educational services is constantly developing (new degree programs and new support services are rapidly being designed). The demand for degree programs offered today does not ensure the success of these programs tomorrow. Under these conditions, the conventional concept of educational activity management (following strict standards and offering a few educational programmes and services) is unviable.

2. Total Quality Management (TQM) system as an instrument of international education management

In the new era of education, the teaching of international students should be based on specific approaches to management. All approaches to the updated development strategy should be based on modern conceptual solutions. Under competitive conditions among universities, success in education is achieved through process-based management. Lately, much attention has been paid to issues of quality management at higher education institutions. Some key issues of TQM implementation in the U.S. and Europe are presented in the paper by Gary Rhoades and Barbara Sporn (2002). The instruments of the TQM system provide new opportunities in the field of management. During rather a short period of time, this approach has expanded from theoretical basics into a practical instrument of planning, implementation, management and improvement of all processes.

The system of components management should correspond to a flexible structure, adaptable to students' needs and a changing environment, which organizes and maintains the processes' functioning and creates a medium for their existence. The quality management system is an integrated instrument of management for all processes. It is necessary, however, to form not only the quality system as a priority, but also the integrated management system as a whole.

3. Specific characteristics of the educational process for international students

Educational activity is a top-priority process, targeted at training specialists who will be competitive in the national labor markets. Therefore, the implementation of the TQM system in the educational process is the most crucial issue.

The unquestionable advantage of any university dealing with international students is its ability to predict the individual demands of international students in the future and suggest a wide range of advanced educational services at reasonable fees.

The range of planning activities and teaching monitoring should be based on a individual approach which considers the student as a participant in the process and equal in rights, as an active and self-contained person. Within this approach a student is given the ability to develop his individual curriculum that is followed by the greater responsibility for outcomes of his training.

The development of new forms and methods of organizing educational activity, the establishment of links between different activities, and understanding effective management instruments are vital to achieving successful results.

The quality of the educational process is determined by several factors: the quality of management in organization and planning (academic programmes and curriculum); the quality of teaching and implementation of offered services (educational techniques, classrooms and labs, equipment); the quality of resource support: methodological and personnel (academic staff, academic books; teaching aids; task-books, etc.). The discussed components and the implemented instruments are presented in Fig.1.

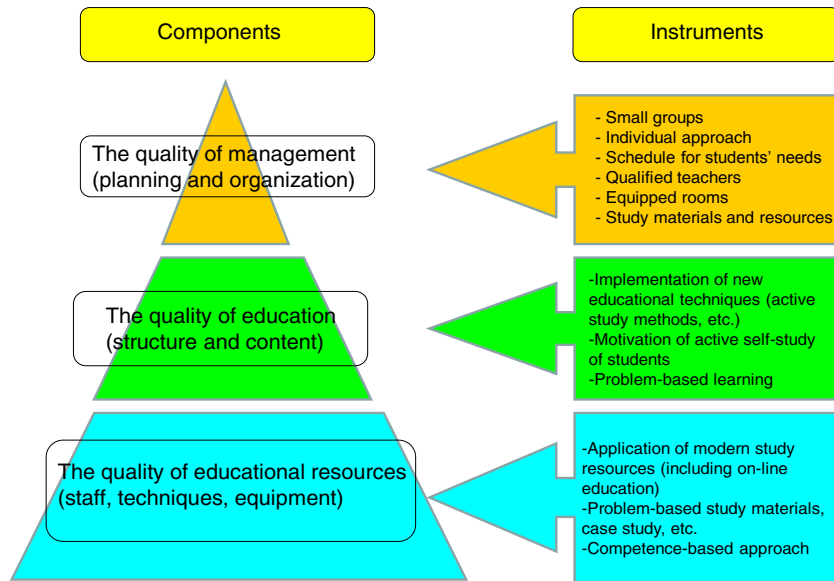


Fig. 1. The components and implemented instruments of TQM system to educational process for international students.

3.1. Planning

One E. Deming's philosophical statements (1982) is about the assurance of quality in education from the planning stage. The quality of educational services is provided by long-term purposes. Successful examples of good planning might be: the formation of small groups that allows for applying the personalized (individual) approach; classes which are scheduled in accordance with students' needs; selection of qualified academics; required lecture-rooms and teaching and learning materials which correspond to peculiar features of training and international standard requirements.

A traditional model of management implies detailed planning, setting goals, resource allocation, and performance review. On the contrary, the model based on the process approach allows for the development of concepts and the strategy of initiating changes as well as the implementation of new forms and techniques of study. Henry Neave (1990), the famous interpreter of E. Deming's philosophy (1982), stresses among the priorities of the quality system the importance of innovations supporting new approaches to education planning and organization, as well as new kinds of educational services and new management techniques.

3.2. Teaching

Educational methods and teaching techniques should satisfy international education requirements. Included among them are active teaching methods and motivation of students' self-study. The continuing improvement of degree programs and the implementation of advanced information technologies are the crucial to sustainable development.

By E. Deming's philosophy, one of the items of the system reorganization is the continuous improvement of all kind of services. For this purpose the understanding of students' needs is important as well as the continuous improvement of the processes and system to meet these needs.

The application of the competence-based approach should also be mentioned as an example of a successful educational practice which fully corresponds to the TQM philosophy. Some research on this topic and positive results of successful implementation of the competence-based approach in universities of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan can be found in papers by Baitucaeva Altynai (2013), Liliya Ismagilova (2014) and M.M. Akeshova (2014).

The implementation of the TQM system in the educational process should be also illustrated by flexible individual planning of the educational process by providing all kinds of degree programs – both full and short-term degrees for international students. Another success factor might be a wide range of degree programs and courses. These might include, for example, innovative Master-degree programs, short-term courses, summer and winter schools of both social and professional fields. The appearance of unique innovations in academic programs enables the increasing competitiveness of a university in the international market of education.

3.3. Educational Resources

The current transformations require resources not only for the educational process, but also for new opportunities and the application of innovative techniques. Also, the approaches and priorities of the concept of resource support have to be changed. Quite recently logistics, methodological and technological resources were the core of all activity as well as the ability to manage them.

The age of intellectual labor has made the human component a priority. The ability to actuate and fully apply the intellectual resources has acquired a more significant meaning than just the management of materials and technology. Therefore, it is obvious that the efficiency of the educational process depends on the academic staff and their ability to apply innovative techniques in the educational process.

Taking into account the specific issues of students' educational backgrounds and issues related to the language barrier, the teaching of international students requires special skills on the part of the teaching staff: firstly the knowledge of pedagogical traditions of different countries; attainment of foreign language teaching methods; and the ability to design adoptable teaching and learning materials. For this reason, the methodological seminars for teachers, IT applications in the educational process, and design of teaching and learning materials suitable for requirements of international students should be regularly carried out.

4. The implementation of TQM in the supporting processes for international students

The main supporting processes for international students include: tutorial activity; research in the field of pedagogy; advertising and marketing; socio-cultural and non-academic activity; as well as management of materials and technology and data resources.

The feature of socio-cultural and non-academic activities is characterized by the fact that students start to live in the environment of a university and a city which is different from their home place. In this case the process deals with the idea of adaptation to climate, society and culture.

The process of data resources management is characterized by the use of special educational technologies and teaching techniques, the development of a wide range of electronic resources for independent work, and teaching and learning materials that meet international standards and students' requirements.

The process of advertising and marketing as an international activity has to be oriented towards working with international applicants (correspondence, personal consulting, etc.), and designing special advertising materials and enrollment (e.g. participation in educational fairs) that correspond to the so-called "client-oriented approach" of E.Deming's theory.

5. Why TQM?

Is the effective operation of any organization possible without the application of TQM instruments? The analysis of activity shows that implementation and application of TQM is determined by the following: a wide range of degree programs; a restricted number of resources for increasing number of students and degree programs/courses; extensive communication with internal departments and partners.

All points stated involve a lot of organizational work due to the numerous tasks which have to be solved. From this point of view, however, only the management instrument based on the process approach can provide the required effectiveness and competitiveness for a modern university.

6. Conclusion

The implementation of the TQM system into the education of international students results in the optimization of all processes both teaching and supportive. The application of effective management for working procedures makes it possible to solve a set of problems: development of academic programs at reasonable and competitive fees in the educational market; the ability to meet students' needs; the ability to attract more international applicants; development and implementation of innovative information technologies for education; and the optimization of management of documents for planning and teaching.

The development of an integral vision for an organizational, systems approach to management becomes the basis for planning and implementing education methods, and effective estimation of activities. The competitive approach to management is realized through a system of processes managed on different levels. TQM not only makes it possible to analyze the results of activities in education, but also providing new opportunities for their improvement. A continuous improvement of processes based on students' needs leads to the improvement of the educational system as a whole. TQM instruments make it possible to predict the prospects for the future, solve feasible problems, and find out ways to accomplish them.

The strategic outcomes also include the support of degree programs with all kinds of resources, increasing students' academic performance, and the quality of education on the whole.

Thus, the TQM principles implemented in international education are effective instruments of long-term strategic management and should be applied to obtain the required outcomes in terms of competitiveness. The institutional activities based on the TQM system provide all kinds of conditions to meet the needs of international students in educational and related services. A system approach to goals and objectives and ways to achieve them and evaluate their outcomes assure success in international education.

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